

Investigating the efficacy of a PELA at Bond University

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Who is Bond University?

- Small private Uni
- Gold Coast, QLD
- Approx 4,000 students
 - 70% domestic
 - 30% international



The Bond situation

- 3 full semesters
- SLS open to all students
- All undergrads do PELA through Core 1 (Critical Thinking & Communication) in 1st semester of study

Bond's PELA - The BELA

Why?

- GPPs
- Graduate Attributes
- Recognition of need to identify & support all students, especially those at risk of failing

Bond English Language Assessment (BELA)

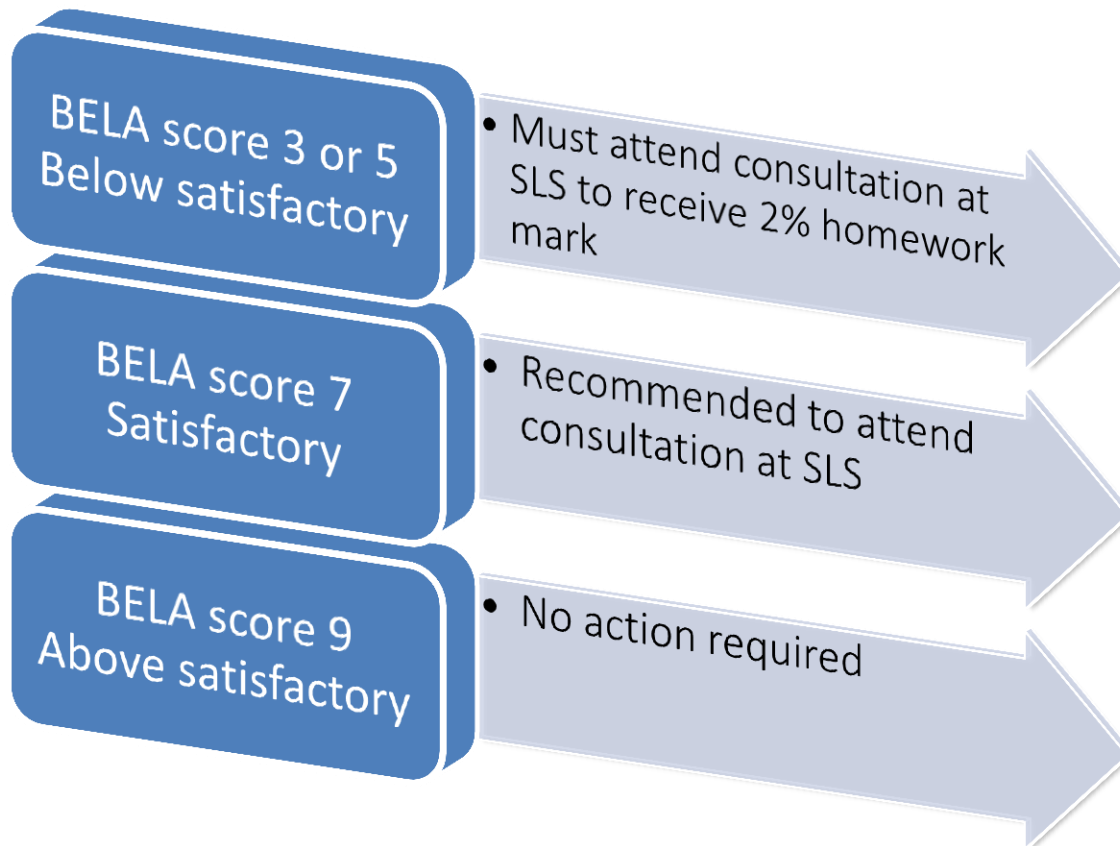
What?

- Online task through Blackboard—simple academic style essay
- 60 minute time limit
- Compulsory homework worth 2%
- Marked by Core 1 tutors using simple criteria
- Feedback sheet available to students online

BELA Marking Criteria

	Below satisfactory	Satisfactory
Organisation	<p>● Marks: 11.11 (11.11%)</p> <p>Limited / No introduction or background information given. No clear thesis statement. Limited / no topic sentences. Not logically organised. No conclusion. Poor use of paragraphs.</p>	<p>● Marks: 33.33 (33.33%)</p> <p>Introduction provides background. Contains clear thesis statement. Contains satisfactory topic sentences. Logically organised. Contains adequate conclusion. Contains logical paragraphs.</p>
Linking and flow	<p>● Marks: 11.11 (11.11%)</p> <p>Inadequate or inaccurate use of cohesive devices. Poor punctuation. Longer sentences tend to be incoherent. Reader has difficulty following the ideas.</p>	<p>● Marks: 33.33 (33.33%)</p> <p>Satisfactory use of cohesive devices. Punctuation generally correct, although there may be some omissions or misuse. Longer sentences generally coherent. Reader can follow the ideas without strain.</p>
Grammar & vocabulary	<p>● Marks: 11.11 (11.11%)</p> <p>Frequent grammatical errors. Limited range of vocabulary, with frequent errors in word choice or word formation. Mixture of formal and informal styles. Errors cause strain on the reader.</p>	<p>● Marks: 33.33 (33.33%)</p> <p>A variety of complex structures. The majority of sentences are error free. Wide range of vocabulary, despite the occasional error in word choice, spelling or word formation. The occasional slip in terms of formal style.</p>

Outcome of BELA results



Follow up

At end of semester, students invited to:

- take BELA 2 (another question)
- participate in focus group
- respond to survey via Survey Monkey

Aim of study

- To investigate the efficacy of BELA in assisting with the instruction of written communication skills

3 semesters

849 students

How?

- Quantitative data analysis:
 - H1: BELA 1 vs. BELA 2
 - H2: SLS attendance and Major Essay grades
 - H3: BELA and overall grade in subject
 - H4: Failure rate for students who did not complete BELA
- Qualitative analysis:
 - Surveys
 - Focus groups

Hypothesis 1: BELA 1 vs BELA 2

1. In comparison to BELA 1 scores, there will be an improvement in the BELA 2 scores of students in the 'Satisfactory' (score of 7) and 'Below satisfactory' (score of either 3 or 5) groups who attended two or more consultations at SLS.

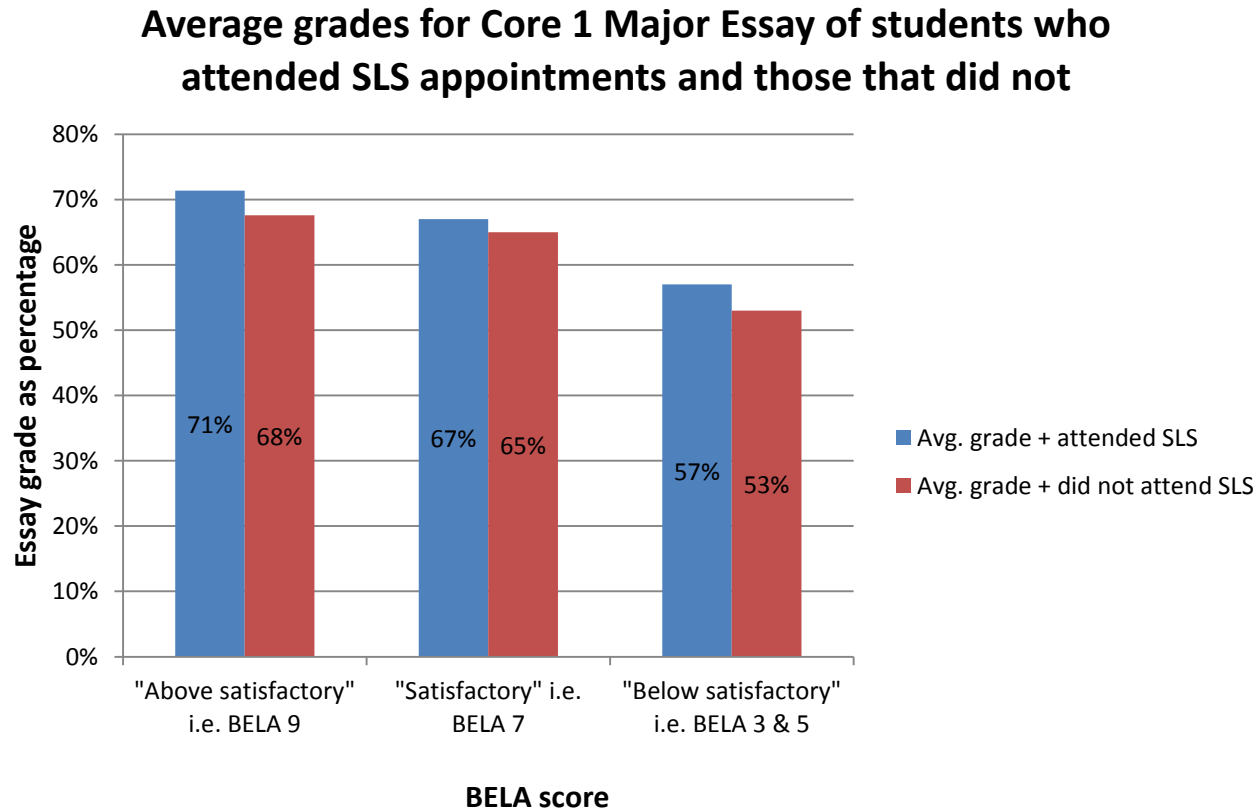
Supported. Correlation of 0.57

But...

- Only 15 students
- Control group (less than 2 appts; 10 students) = correlation of 0.53

Hypothesis 2: SLS attendance & essay grade

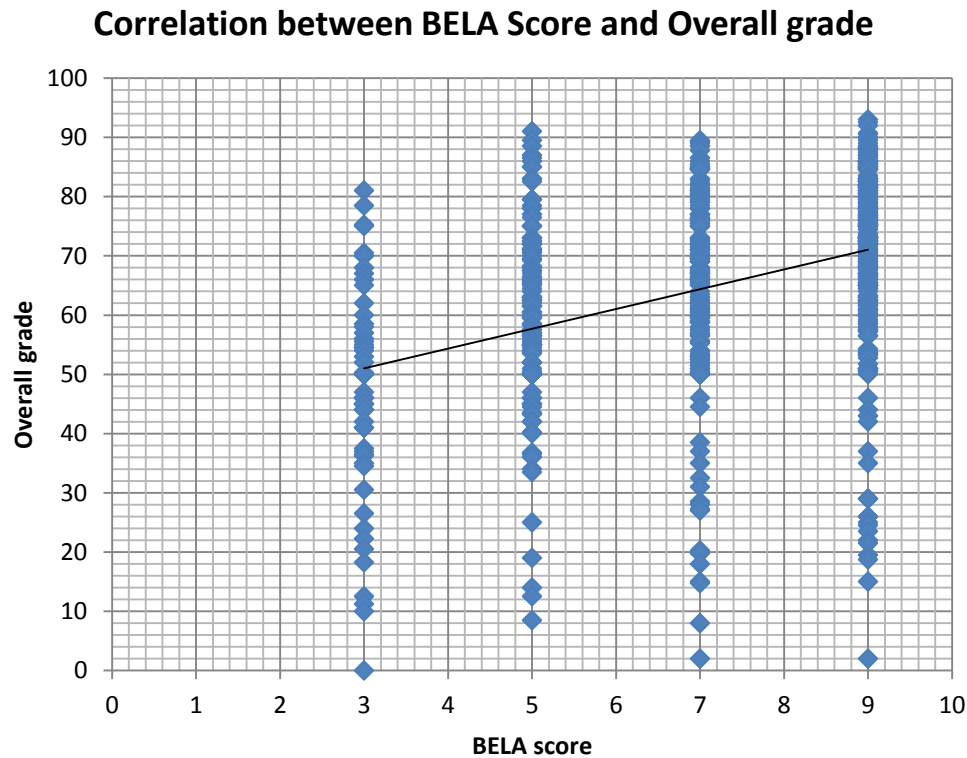
- Students who attend at least one appointment at SLS would, on average, perform better in their Core 1 Major Essays.



Hypothesis 3: BELA & overall grade

3. For students who completed BELA, there would be an overall correlation between BELA score and overall grade in the subject.

Supported. Correlation of 0.38



9s = 343

7s = 218

5s = 138

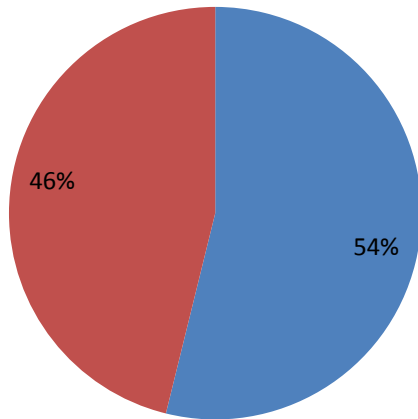
3s = 58

Hypothesis 4: failure rate & did not complete

4. Students who did not complete BELA (Score 0) were more likely to fail the subject than those that completed the task

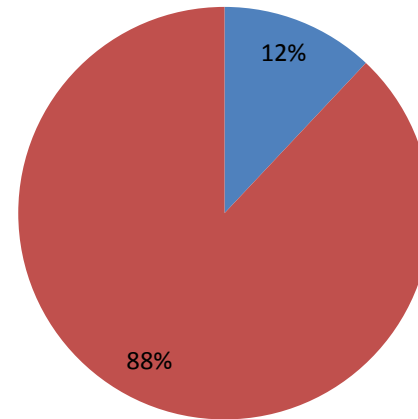
Did not complete BELA
(n=91)

■ Failed subject ■ Passed subject



Completed BELA
(n=757)

■ Failed subject ■ Passed subject



What did students think about BELA?

- “I think it is good to have a go at writing an essay that doesn't directly affect your grades when you first start your course. I had not written one in 4 years, therefore I had very little skills in writing. When I was handed my first piece of assessment I was more confident I knew what I had to do.”
- “It was easy to do and didn't take long and helped heaps.”
- “Was a good way to see how i am going before completing assessments”

What did students think about BELA?

- “It wasn't anything spectacular. I did it because I needed to. It would be important though for finding students who need help.”
- “Wasn't really a fan of the BELA task. I'm a strong believer that if an individual wants to improve themselves, they need to be independent in doing so.”
- “I feel that the service would be better if it provided more specific feedback.”

What we learned from feedback

Importance of terminology

- Test v. task

Influence of time factor

- Increase from 40 to 60 mins

Pre-emptive support helps

- Top tips
- Writing masterclass

Issues

- Marking criteria
- Small sample size for BELA 2
- Difficulty of getting most 'at risk' students either to do BELA or attend an appointment
- Limitation to written assessment

The wider value of BELA

- Bringing more students into SLS
- Attempting to close the net on students at risk
- Raising awareness among academics & administrators within uni
- Greater co-operation between SLS & academics
- More opportunities for embedding

Future directions

- Find ways to address the zero contingent & bring in the other 35% of 3 & 5 scores
- Improve marking criteria
- Implementation of BELA 2 into Core 3
- Implementation of BELA for post-grad students
- More longitudinal study of students' performance over the whole degree

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